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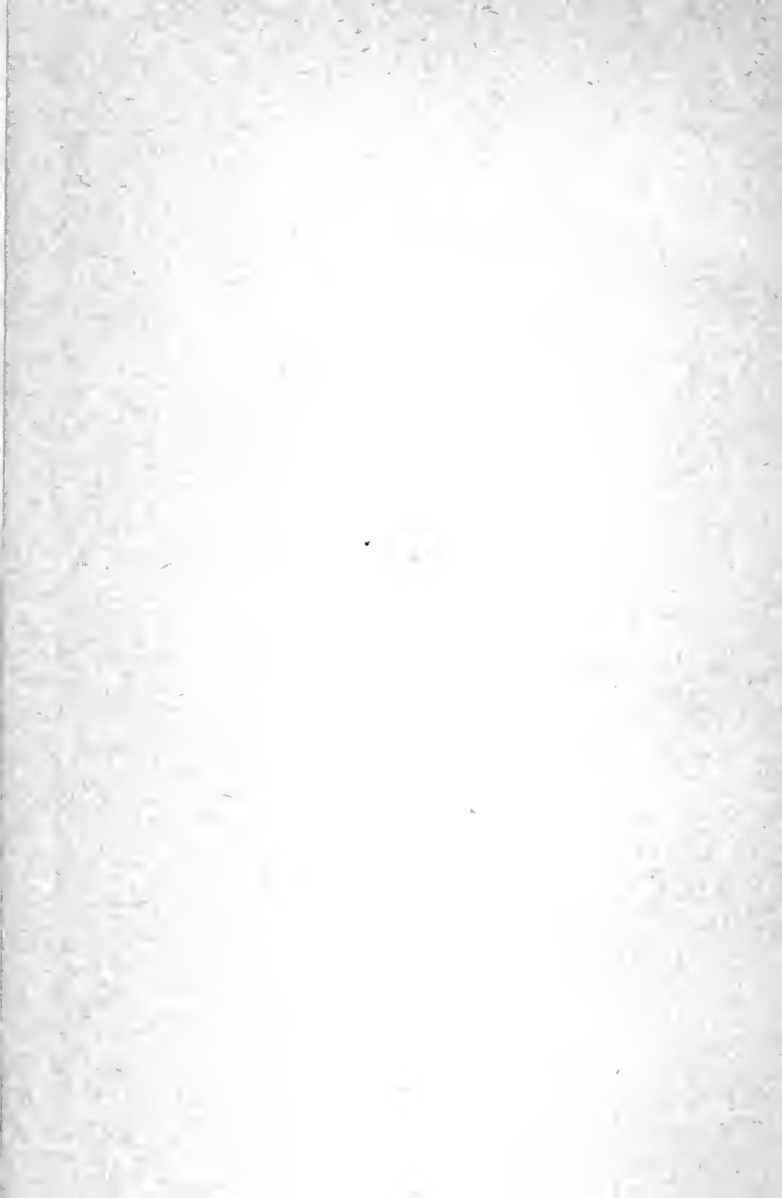
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Poems and Rhymes



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Jeffery Day

Poems and Rhymes

By
Jeffery Day
L. S. D.
Flight-Commander, R.N.A.S.



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MEMOIR

“ HERE is a young writer,” a reader of these verses may guess, “ untrammelled by literary traditions. He does not write as a literary man would write, but he writes musically and he knows the difference between prose and verse. Probably he is a young airman newly led to poetry by the wonders of flight.”

The guess would be right. These were the writer's first and last verses. The growth of power shown by the short series suggests to us that, had he lived, his name might have been added to the golden roll of poets; but it is written clearly on the golden roll of warriors only, and for the rest he must be numbered amongst “ the inheritors of unfulfilled renown.”

Miles Jeffery Game Day was a Flight-Commander in the naval air service, and one of its most brilliant young officers. He was born at St. Ives, Hunts, on December 1st, 1896, of a family settled for generations on the banks of the Ouse. He was at school at Sandroyd House and at Repton; and at eighteen years of age he received his commission as sub-lieutenant. From the first he showed exceptional skill as a pilot, and was chosen for work at sea that needed high technical accomplishment. But he was dissatisfied with the comparative in-

activity of the life afloat, and secured his transfer to a fighting squadron on the Western front. Already famous in his service as a master of the art of flight, in France he became famous as a fighter also, and received the distinguished service cross "for great skill and bravery as a fighting pilot.' "

But when that announcement was gazetted the end had already come in a characteristic act of audacity and self-sacrifice. On February 27th, 1918, to quote his commanding officer's account,

"he was shot down by six German aircraft which he attacked single-handed, out to sea. He had out-distanced his flight, I think because he wished to break the [enemy's] formation, in order to make it easier for the less experienced people behind him to attack. He hit the enemy and they hit his machine, which burst into flames; but, not a bit flurried, he nose-dived, flattened out, and landed perfectly on the water. He climbed out of his machine and waved his fellow-pilots back to their base; being in aeroplanes [not sea-planes] they could not assist him."

Immediate and prolonged search was made for him, but in vain.

Such is the short record of his life, a record that can do no more than suggest the personality

behind. The picture of that, a gracious and a glorious thing, can best be filled in by the words of one that knew him well both in his service and in his writing.

“ It was at Harwich late in 1916 that I first met Jeff Day. I was sitting with E. C. in the gathering place of naval officers, the hall of an hotel, and we were I remember in a critical and discontented humour about England and the war. English people, we were saying, have too low a standard of industry and devotion : they make too much of their amusements and their leisure ; for all their courage they lack the spirit of aggression. ‘ It comes to this ’ I said, ‘ there are too many of us that are not “ all out.” ’ We agreed in that ; and then C. called my attention to a young sub-lieutenant of the R.N.A.S. who was waiting for his tea at the far end of the room, a lad of small stature with a bright, strong face. ‘ There is a lad that would cheer you up ’ he said ; and when I asked why, ‘ talk of “ all out ! ” ’ he answered, ‘ he is pure gold.’ He called the sub-lieutenant over to share our tea and we spoke of their common adventures in the North Sea, of the war in the air, and of how dull it was at Harwich.

“ My first thought as he joined us was ‘ what a fine head ! it is like that of some Florentine

knight modelled by Donatello, who made the St. George.' When he began to speak I felt at once (like all that met him) the attraction of his manner, so gentle yet so absorbed and so full of restrained vitality, of his velvet voice, and of his eager talk. 'Here' I said to myself, 'is a boy with a beautiful manner. He is very much alive too, and interested in what he says. The things that he says come fresh from his thoughts, they are not said parrot-wise. It would be pleasant to meet him again,' and I schemed to do so. We were talking about teas, and he told us of a farm that he had found in a wood beyond the river where there was still a good tea to be had, as good as before the war. "It really is a perfectly good tea' he said, and made us feel as happy as possible because he himself was so happy in the thought of the tea. I got a promise from him on the spot that he would guide me to his farm on the next Sunday.

"C. had spoken to him as 'Babe' only, and it was not until he left that I learnt his proper name. I remembered then that I had heard in my ship some gossip about one Day. I had heard him spoken of as a young pilot in a seaplane carrier who could do things with an aeroplane that nobody else could do. The Flag-Commander had been to see him fly and they had made his hair stand on end, he had said, the things that he had seen, the

loops and spins. It was an arresting thing that the airman of whom I had heard as a wonder of skill and daring and the boy who was so keen about his tea should be one and the same.

“The next Sunday we met on the jetty and walked out to his farm beyond the river. He had first noticed the farm as he flew over it, and he and his shipmates had hunted it out and made it their meeting-place. The motherly heart of the woman of the place was quite enslaved by him ; she greeted him then and always with great fuss and outcries. Here was Mr. Day ; she knew the tea that he liked ; fresh eggs, how many ? (three) ; hot scones and butter, and her own jam. Mr. Day was the gentleman that did funny things to amuse her when he flew overhead. She wished that he wouldn't, it made her heart jump. Her tongue ran on and on about her Mr. Day, and the tea when it came had a plenty and a freshness that were a tribute of true affection. When we had finished it we went and looked at the young things on the farm, the chickens, ducklings, and colts. They gave him keen delight ; he was of their company and knew their ways in play. His first favourite, though, was an old gander, that would put its head down and charge him the length of the field. It was a stout-hearted old bird, he said, and whenever he came to the farm he got up a row with it.

“ As we walked out along the shores of the tidal river that afternoon and he talked to me about the air I began to feel like one on the verge of a surprising and fortunate discovery. ‘ Here ’ I was thinking, ‘ is something much more than a lad with a charming manner. C. was right ; here is a warrior spirit keen and strong as a sword.’ And as we returned in the evening and the restraint of strangeness grew less I felt that the discovery had been made. ‘ Here ’ I told myself then, ‘ is something more even than a high warrior spirit ; here is one that embraces with impetuous yet delicate sympathy all vital and beautiful things. Vitality runs out of him in a bubbling stream. He has more enjoyment of all things worth enjoying and he is better able to express his enjoyment than anybody I ever knew. Nor is his enjoyment mere animal good spirits. It has a deeper root in a quick humour for the comic element in life and in keen appreciation of all lovely and hearty things, whether of the natural world or of the mind. When he speaks of some wonderful flight through clouds and sunshine I can feel the air rushing past me and revel with him in the miracles of light and colour that he has seen. But there is a better thing still. It is not about his own marvellous service that he likes best to talk : he is happiest when he is talking about country places and especially about his own

country-side of river, fen, and mere. He loves them truly and he has with them an intimate companionship. With his love and intimacy he can paint in his talk pictures of them so bright and actual that I can hardly believe that I have not been with him for long night hours in his boat upon the river or lying at dusk among the reeds to wait for the homing waterfowl. He talks of them like a poet, I thought, a poet that has walked hand in hand with nature.

“When we separated to go each to his ship I found myself still thinking about him with delight and wonder. Can it really be—my thoughts ran thus—that here is one of those natures which we may dream about but can hardly hope to find, a nature made after the manner of Philip Sidney, poet and knight in one? I have known in the war other men of transcendent courage and devotion, but they had not the poet’s power of understanding the great value and beauty of life. I have known other men with the poet’s power, but they had not the high qualities of courage and devotion that would have made themselves as beautiful as their poems. I have never known before one that combined those two things, but I believe that I know one now. And then I thought of Jeff’s effervescent gaiety and of his simple and youthful distrust of solemn and difficult things. How astonished he would be at

these reflections! But in spite of that I was sure that I was right about the discovery, and thereafter the better I knew him the more sure I grew.

“ Since his ship lay far from mine and the farm was remote we could not meet very often, so we started a lively correspondence that went backwards and forwards in the duty boat. With one of his letters he sent me a pamphlet of Christmas jokes that he had written to amuse his ward-room. Some of the short rhymes in it seemed to me very well done. I remember in particular one that he had written about himself :

‘ Chatter, chatter, little Day !
What a lot you’ve got to say—
Umpty-thousand words a minute
Even your Maxim isn’t in it ! ’

The turning of them suggested that he had a natural faculty for rhyming, and when next we met he confessed that he did sometimes write verses, ‘ lots of them, like Gilbert.’ But these diversions, he maintained, were not to be taken seriously. It was to be understood that he had the misfortune to be a creature of moods. He wrote verses hard for a bit and then drew hard for a bit and then did nothing at all for a bit but sit still. He had to do things straight off and at full speed or not at all.

"About those moods of his he was quite right. Things rushed up out of his mind with an irresistible impulse and then stopped until something else began to rush. Even in conversation the sparkling stream would sometimes stop quite dead and he would drift away into rapt and inward contemplation of things that one was not told about. It was always so if the conversation, as conversations will in a mess, became dull or coarse. I think that then without any conscious effort he stopped hearing it and began to attend inwardly to some jolly thing, some good joke, some adventure of the air, some memory of his river. He would sit by, leaning forward with an intent look, and give a little laugh now and then as if he were listening to what was being said. But in fact he was listening only to his own jollier thoughts, and suddenly he would tumble back into the conversation with some perfectly inapposite remark which came as a rebuke to the groundlings, effectual, though quite unintended.

"In spite of his diffidence the poetry that gleamed at times in his talk and in his letters about the air and the country made it clear that it was well worth while that he should take his verse-writing more seriously than he was yet inclined: so I urged him to write something about the air, not like Gilbert, but less burlesque. His answer was the poem "On the wings of the morning."

A month or two later came his second poem "An airman's dream." This was all his own idea. It was written off at great speed, he enjoyed writing it tremendously, and always spoke of it with the most engaging admiration. Probably he would not have written it quite as he did but for Rupert Brooke's "Grantchester," which he greatly admired; but his poem has a freshness and vitality which "Grantchester" in its rather elaborate technical accomplishment seems to lack. His third and last considerable poem, the lines "To my brother," were written later in France. There is a touch of deeper feeling in them that shows an increase of power. I know that these three poems have given pleasure to many people, but I am unable to form any critical estimate of them myself. They speak so clearly and directly with his voice that a friend of his could no more analyse his affection for the verses than he could analyse his affection for their writer.

"His skill and daring were now a legend in our force. When strangers talked of great airmen elsewhere we said 'but you should see Day in *Vindex*.' This high reputation of his had the best of foundations in the generous and open admiration of his own service. One day he came out to the farm with his immediate superior, Flight-Commander K. Jeff was particularly riotous that day and as he skirmished about the

wood K. sat with me in the sun and told about Jeff's flying. Jeff was the finest pilot he had ever known. "A light scout machine, like a horse, needs the right sort of hands, and he has the best hands in the world. A great test—he can do things at slow speed that other people venture on with a rush only; and of course" said K., echoing C., 'he is absolutely "all out."' That was the quality in him that seemed always to strike others of his service as pre-eminent, that there was no reserve in his devotion. Others, even the best of officers, might sometimes slacken the bow, might shrink if ever so little from the great and incessant dangers of their service, might allow some distraction to mitigate a little their spirit of aggression. He never flagged or faltered, was never set on his duty and more than his duty with an intensity of purpose that was less than absolute. To be so, I think, cost him no conscious effort. Complete devotion was his by nature, with all the vigour and daring that for an airman it implies. To the serious and ardent spirit that lay beneath his gaiety, revealed to us by his verses only and by flashes in his talk, self-interest and self-consideration were unknown. Half-hearted ways and people he did not actively condemn: they did not exist for him. He might perhaps say of some example of shirking that it was 'perfectly bad'; but about such dead-alive

things he did not trouble his head. All unknown to him this single-mindedness of his made him a great source of strength in others. Bound to him by his loveliness, people shrank from any failure in his presence lest they should trouble the serenity of his devotion. It would have been dreadful for one of his friends to have failed in duty under his eye. Jeff would have smiled at him in a puzzled way, suspecting a joke, would have been sadly bothered about him for a little, and would then have stopped thinking about him altogether, turning his thoughts to jollier things: and nobody that knew him could be indifferent to such an exclusion.

“ His life at Harwich seemed to him too inactive, and he grew very discontented with it. He knew—he could not help knowing—that he was in the front rank as a pilot and he longed greatly for more active service. It could not have been otherwise. To a nature so ardent and resolute—frustration in the activity in which it feels itself most alive is the worst evil that can befall. So it was no surprise when on return from leave in the autumn of 1917 I learnt that he had succeeded in getting himself transferred to a light cruiser, the *Cassandra*, where there was promise of more to do.

“ He enjoyed being with the ‘ proper Navy ’ ; but it turned out that in his new work he had no

better opportunities than before and he was pleased when an accident to his ship sent him to the experimental air-station at Grain.

" I saw him at Grain on my way back to Flanders (whither I had been transferred) from leave in October 1917. When I arrived at the flying ground he was away in the air and I waited for him at his shed. There was a senior warrant-officer in charge there and it was amusing to learn from his talk how quickly a legend had grown up around Jeff at Grain and how firmly his sway had become established. There was a fine flyer ! the finest ever seen at Grain. To see him bank vertically in his scout !—and the other gentlemen had said it was impossible. Here he came now ; you could always tell him by the way he flew.

" The tiny machine floated down and I too like the old warrant-officer, although I knew it was only our affection for the pilot that made us think so, had an illusion that there was something characteristically lively, light, and swift about its motion. As he brought the machine to earth a puff of wind caught it, and he had to turn up again and, flying to one side, to land with something of a bump. The warrant-officer looked aside and growled ' you wouldn't often see him land like that.' He could not bear that his idol should not be seen to the best advantage.

“ Perhaps it was the red and brown given to Jeff by the great winds in which he lived and the sparks that shone in his eyes, but his face always seemed to have something smouldering in it, a suggestion of internal fires that were ever on the point of breaking through in visible flames. On that day his look and talk were even more brilliantly alive than usual. The fresh interest of the difficult work that he was doing (making experiments with machines of novel types) had carried him up and away into complete absorption in the air. His thoughts and purposes inhabited a remote and high region whither a groundling could hardly follow them ; and then with one of his swift changes he returned to earth to talk of days that he had been spending at home on leave, of the river and the reeds, and of what he had seen at dawn and dusk on the great level of the fens. Now that he had begun to realise in poetry his love for the beauty of the world he spoke of these things with all a poet’s confidence. They were the things worth caring about and people who did not care about them were not for him. He spoke of people who ‘ understood ’ and people who did not understand, meaning an understanding of the loveliness of the face of nature, and less clearly and articulately perhaps, but not unconsciously, of the worth of everything in life that is ‘ lovely and of good report.’ ”

“ It was certain that he would never rest content with any service but the highest. Difficult as the work was at Grain he was still longing for direct action with the enemy. By urgent requests and by some audacity in acting upon a qualified assent as if it were unqualified, he managed to secure his transfer to a fighting squadron on the western front. My battery was not far away. In December I heard from him that he was coming, and soon afterwards that he had arrived.

“ I found him next day in a company of famous pilots and observers. It was too soon after his arrival for his quality to have become known to them: there had not yet been time for the legend to grow. ‘ But that will not take long ’ I thought, and truly it did not. A series of brilliant fights and victories soon re-established his fame, and when I visited him again a week later he was back in the middle of the stage, the unconscious pattern of his company. Talking with other airmen there and round about I found that to speak of him was ever to bind a common bond. One heard always the same thing, ‘ a great pilot and absolutely “ all out ” ’ ; and as if they found the thought of him a happy and a heartening thing and were glad to have the chance of paying in generous praise something of their debt to him for the cheerfulness and inspiration that he brought into their lives, they

would turn the conversation back to him again and again.

“On Christmas Day he came up and had dinner with us in our dugout. We crawled about the top of the dunes to look at the trenches of the Germans, and when they began to shell us he professed to find it very exciting. I said that one could not be expected to believe that he found anything exciting after his experiences in the air ; but he answered that he never now had any real excitement in the air at all. At moments of difficulty and danger, he explained as if it were a matter of course, he found himself thinking harder and quicker than at other times, but that was the only difference. ‘It does seem a matter of course’ I said to myself, ‘that Jeff should be above fear, because it is a matter of course that he should be Jeff ; but it is equally a matter of course that other people should be different.’ I asked him then a question which before I had always been ashamed to ask, did he never give a thought to the dangers of his service ? He supposed, he said, that he didn’t. At school he had been an anxious little boy, always worrying about things. But as soon as he began to fly he found that he stopped worrying or being anxious about anything. It was difficult to believe that Jeff had ever been anxious or worried ; but I thought that I understood how it might have seemed so

to him. His capacity for a burning intensity of purpose had been there in his school-days and had worried him by its search for an outlet.

“ There is a photograph of him as a little boy with a cricket bat that has caught perfectly his habitual expression, and in so open a countenance expression and character are one. The boy looks at you and seems to say ‘ what a ripping business it is, you and everybody and everything,’ and yet there is an air about him—one must not call it haughty, perhaps one may call it aloof—that says too, ‘ and now I hope you will get out of my way and let me get on with the most ripping business of all, the business of being Jeff.’ Coupled with self-regarding impulses such aloofness and concentration make the great successes of the common world; coupled as they were in him with impulses that are self-devoting they make the hero or the saint. The air blew from his mind all the dusts of doubt and fanned the hero in him into flames.

“ A few weeks later I had to take a railway truck down to Dunkirk to mount a new gun, and he came to see me in my van among the docks. His reputation was now high in his Wing, he had been made a Flight-Commander, and he had conspicuous victories to his credit.¹ At last his

¹ “ On January 25th he attacked single-handed six enemy triplanes, one of which he shot down; on February 2nd he attacked and destroyed an enemy two-seater machine on

work was the highest to be had and gave him full scope for his capacities, so at last he was perfectly content. Fighting in the air, I heard, was the best thing in the world, and he talked of it so vividly that I could believe myself up there with him, wheeling and striking like a hawk at a heron. But his best pleasure, fine craftsman that he was, was not in the mere animal exhilaration of the fights, it was in the art and craft of them. He dwelt most upon how good it was to have to think in a flash about all the different things that there were to do and to invent in mid-flight new measures for new crises. That was I suppose the hall-mark of his genius as an airman; that at the tremendous moments he was even more in possession of himself than usual.

“We met once and twice again, and then in February I was recalled from France, and he came to see me and to say good-bye. As I listened to the high confidence with which he spoke now of his service I thought—he is like a prince that has come into his kingdom. It is so natural that we who love him should fear for him and long that his danger might be less, but knowing that his high nature is attaining here to perfect achievement we wrong him by our fears and belittle our

reconnaissance at 18,000 feet. He destroyed several enemy machines in a short space of time, and in addition had numerous indecisive engagements.” *London Gazette*, March 16th, 1918 (award of d.s.c.).

own love. The Jeff that we value so much has his being in the exercise of courage and devotion. To wish that he might have less opportunity for their exercise is to wish that he might be less Jeff. If he was to rise to this height things could not have been otherwise, and we must be content, as he is.

“ I wondered then what motive or principle was the basis of his content in his devoted service. He used to talk little about abstract ideas ; his sense of beauty was satisfied as yet with the beauty of material things, the sights and sounds of nature and the happy states of mind that they induce. It was sure however that a mind so alert and fine had some strong relation with the ideas of patriotism and self-sacrifice, although unexpressed perhaps even to itself. So, although I knew that I was going to bore him I turned our conversation thither. He drifted away into silence and we arrived at the gulf of a yawn. But then his attention suddenly returned and he said, ‘ that’s quite all right. One feels as they did when there were dragons to fight.’ I too felt then that it was quite all right, and that his confession of faith was better than much elaborate reasoning and self-analysis.

“ When he must go we walked together down the trench to the corner at which his car was waiting. It was dark, but the flashing of the

guns was bright enough to give me for remembrance a last picture of his noble head. 'Good night, good luck!' he said, and 'good night, dragon-slayer!' said I, and he whirled away."

.

His service, done in the spirit in which he did it, requires more valour and endurance than have ever been required of man before. He met the new call and did more than meet it: he thrust ahead and with his poet's fire lit a new beacon on the path of duty. The memory of him and of his fellow-knights will be the treasure of all English hearts in after time. We bear it in trust for them.

E. H. Y.

POÉMS

AN AIRMAN'S DREAM

WHEN I am wearied through and through
and all the things I have to do
are senseless, peevish, little things,
my mind escapes on happier wings
to an old house, that is mine own,
lichen-kissed and overgrown ;
with gables here and gables there
and tapered chimneys everywhere,
with millstone hearths for burning logs,
and kettles singing from the dogs,
with faintest taint of willow smoke,
and rough-hewn beams of darkened oak,
with unexpected steps and nooks,
and cases full of leather books—
soft water colours, that I love,
and in the bedrooms up above
large four-post beds and lots of air,
where I may lie without a care
and hear the rustle of the leaves
and starlings fighting in the eaves.

Around the house a garden lies,
a many-coloured paradise,
with sunlit lawns and stately trees
that murmur in the summer breeze,
with beds of flowers, not too tame,
all bright, and never two the same,

and wicker chairs in shady places
to shelter folk with honest faces :
and, if the Lord is very good
and all things happen as they should,
there is a river slipping by
clear as the depthless summer sky,
cool to the touch, and very deep,
quietly smiling in its sleep,
where large, well-educated trout
scull themselves lazily round about :
and here, in a secluded spot,
an ancient punt for when it's hot,
where I can lie and read a book ;
and a canoe to mount the brook
which babbles on with cheerful noise,
chattering low its little joys,
telling how, through Newton's wood,
it stole, sedate and very good,
but when it tumbled through the mill
it thumped the old wheel with a will ;
how the pike of Sandy Ridge
caught the old chub below the bridge ;
and so on, if I choose to listen,
until the evening dewdrops glisten.
Thus the river slowly glides,
with soft green meadows at the sides
and graceful trees, that form a screen
of greeny brown and brownny green.

Down the stream a mile or two
the fenlands come, where trees are few,
a country very deeply blessed
because its sunsets are the best.
There sturdy, sad-eyed fenmen toil,
tilling the heavy, rich-brown soil ;
a land where the grey heron breeds,
and wild fowl paddle in the reeds ;
a land of molten, golden reds,
of ripening corn, and osier beds.
And up the stream comes rolling ground,
with little hills, smooth-topped and round,
and shady woods and pasture lands ;
and far away a mountain stands—
faint silhouette of hazy blue
adding enchantment to the view,
and pleasant sense of mystery
of what the other side may be :
and on these grass lands, in the breeze,
I ride wherever I may please,
and in these woods, where're I go,
there is no man to say me no.

My companions here are few,
some horses and a dog or two,
cocker spaniels, silver grey,
with tails a wagging all the day :
and all these servants old and tried
are brimming up with quiet pride,

with lots to say, and all content,
each on the other's business bent.
A lady too, divinely fair,
with dark blue eyes and blue black hair,
who may be gentle and forgiving,
but who must know the joy of living :
shall brightly smile and blithely sing
and laugh with me at everything,
and love the things that I love best,
the woods, the stream, and all the rest.
She, through the languid summer days,
shall roam with me down shaded ways,
and drift with me, as in a dream,
peacefully down the tranquil stream,
and share with me the sweet delights
of moonlit brooks on summer nights,
and through the howling winter days
shall be content to sit and gaze,
embedded in an easy chair,
watching the firewood spark and flare.

And other things I'll have are these,
large breakfasts and enormous teas,
honey and homemade bread, still hot,
and butter from an earthen pot,
with new laid eggs and clotted cream.
Oh Lord !—to think it's all a dream !¹

¹ Note A, p. 63.

TO MY BROTHER

AT first, when unaccustomed to death's sting,
I thought that, should you die, each sweetest thing,
each thing of any merit on this earth,
would perish also, beauty, love, and mirth :
and that the world, despoiled and God-forsaken,
its glories gone, its greater treasures taken,
would sink into a slough of apathy
and there remain into eternity,
a mournful-minded, soul-destroying place
wherein there would be seen no smiling face,
where all desire to love and live would cease,
and death would be the only way to peace.
And when one day the aching blow did fall
for many days I did not live at all,
but, dazed and halting, made my endless way
painfully through a tangled growth of grey
and clinging thorns, dismal, towards belief,
and uncontrollable, heart-racking grief.
It could not be !—that one so fair and strong,
so honest-minded, and so void of wrong,
that one who made such splendid use of life,
whose smile could soothe the bitterness of strife
and make a cold, hard nature warm and soft
(who used to smile so frankly and so oft)
should die, and leave our spirits numb and
 breaking,
grief-stifled, and yet empty, sick, and breaking.

I prayed that God might give me power to sever
your sad remembrance from my mind forever.

“ Never again shall I have heart to do
the things in which we took delight, we two.
I cannot bear the cross. Oh, to forget
the haunting vision of the past ! ” : and yet
surely it were a far more noble thing
to keep your memories all fresh as spring,
to do again the things that we held dear
and thus to feel your spirit ever near.

This I will do when peace shall come again—
peace and return, to ease my heart of pain.
Crouched in the brittle reed-beds wrapped in grey
I'll watch the dawning of the winter's day,
the peaceful, clinging darkness of the night
that mingles with the mystic morning light,
and graceful rushes, melting in the haze,
while all around in winding water ways
the wild fowl gabble cheerfully and low
or wheel with pulsing whistle to and fro,
filling the silent dawn with sweetest song,
swelling and dying as they sweep along,
till shadows of vague trees deceive the eyes
and stealthily the sun begins to rise,
striving to smear with pink the frosted sky
and pierce the silver mist's opacity ;
until the hazy silhouettes grow clear
and faintest hints of colouring appear,

and the slow, throbbing, red, distorted sun
reaches the sky, and all the large mists run,
leaving the little ones to wreathe and shiver,
pathetic, clinging to the friendly river ;
until the watchful heron, grim and gaunt,
shows, ghostlike, standing at his favourite haunt,
and jerkily the moorhens venture out,
spreading swift, circled ripples round about ;
and softly to the ear, and leisurely
querulous, comes the plaintive plover's cry.
And then, maybe, some whispering near by,
some still, small, sound as of a happy sigh
shall steal upon my senses, soft as air,
and, brother ! I shall know that thou are there.

Then, with my gun forgotten in my hand,
I'll wander through the snow-encrusted land,
following the tracks of hare and stoat, and traces
of bird and beast, as delicate as laces,
doing again the things that we held dear,
keeping thy gracious spirit ever near,
comforted by the blissful certainty
and sweetness of thy splendid company.
And in the lazy summer nights I'll glide
silently down the sleepy river's tide,
listening to the music of the stream,
the plop of ponderously playful bream,
the water whispering around the boat,
and from afar the white owl's liquid note

that lingers through the stillness, soft and slow ;
watching the little yacht's red homely glow,
her vague reflection, and her clean cut spars
ink-black against the stillness of the stars,
stealthily slipping into nothingness,
while on the river's moon-splashed surfaces
tall shadows sweep. Then, when I go to rest,
it may be that my slumbers will be blest
by the faint sound of thy untroubled breath,
proving thy presence near, in spite of death.

'THE MILL

VERY clear and very still
are the waters of the mill,
starting first from yonder hill,
making straightway for the mill,
dewy fresh and sweetly chill
running ever, late and early.
First a trickle, then a rill,
dropping down towards the mill,
growing quickly, singing shrill—
such a busy hurly-burly !
what a bustle ! what a thrill !
trying hard to reach the mill,
how the little voices trill—
“ why’s the silly course so curly ? ”
running, leaping with a will,
hurrying to work the mill,
racing noisily, until
down the chute, all swift and swirly,
with an eager splash, they spill
on the old wheel of the mill,
throwing wide a creamy frill
of dancing foam and bubbles pearly,
sliding onward smoothly down the sill.

ON THE WINGS OF THE MORNING

A SUDDEN roar, a mighty rushing sound,
a jolt or two, a smoothly sliding rise,
a jumbled blur of disappearing ground,
and then all sense of motion slowly dies.
Quiet and calm, the earth slips past below,
as underneath a bridge still waters flow.

My turning wing inclines towards the ground ;
the ground itself glides up with graceful swing
and at the plane's far tip twirls slowly round,
then drops from sight again beneath the wing
to slip away serenely as before,
a cubist-patterned carpet on the floor.

Hills gently sink and valleys gently fill.
The flattened fields grow infinitely small ;
slowly they pass beneath and slower still
until they hardly seem to move at all.
Then suddenly they disappear from sight,
hidden by fleeting wisps of faded white.

The wing-tips, faint and dripping, dimly show,
blurred by the wreaths of mist that intervene.
Weird, half-seen shadows flicker to and fro
across the pallid fog-bank's blinding screen.
At last the choking mists release their hold,
and all the world is silver, blue, and gold.

The air is clear, more clear than sparkling wine ;
 compared with this, wine is a turgid brew.
The far horizon makes a clean-cut line
 between the silver and the depthless blue.
 Out of the snow-white level reared on high
 glittering hills surge up to meet the sky.

Outside the wind screen's shelter gales may race :
 but in the seat a cool and gentle breeze
blows steadily upon my grateful face
 as I sit motionless and at my ease,
 contented just to loiter in the sun
 and gaze around me till the day is done.

And so I sit, half sleeping, half awake,
 dreaming a happy dream of golden days,
until at last, with a reluctant shake,
 I rouse myself, and with a lingering gaze
 at all the splendour of the shining plain
 make ready to come down to earth again.

The engine stops : a pleasant silence reigns—
 silence, not broken, but intensified
by the soft, sleepy wires' insistent strains,
 that rise and fall, as with a sweeping glide
 I slither down the well-oiled sides of space
 towards a lower, less enchanted place.

The clouds draw nearer, changing as they come.

Now, like a flash, fog grips me by the throat.
Down goes the nose : at once the wires' low hum
begins to rise in volume and in note,
till as I hurtle from the choking cloud
it swells into a scream, high-pitched and loud.

The scattered hues and shades of green and brown
fashion themselves into the land I know,
turning and twisting, as I spiral down
towards the landing-ground ; till, skimming low,
I glide with slackening speed across the
ground,
and come to rest with lightly grating sound.¹

¹ Note B, p. 65.

NORTH SEA

DAWN on the drab North Sea !—
colourless, cold, and depressing,
with the sun that we long to see
refraining from his blessing.
To the westward—sombre as doom :
to the eastward—grey and foreboding :
Comes a low, vibrating boom—
the sound of a mine exploding.

Day on the drear North Sea !—
wearisome, drab, and relentless.
The low clouds swiftly flee ;
bitter the sky, and relentless.
Nothing at all in sight
save the mast of a sunken trawler,
fighting her long, last fight
with the waves that mouth and maul her.

Gale on the bleak North Sea !—
howling a dirge in the rigging.
Slowly and toilfully
through the great, grey breakers digging,
thus we make our way,
hungry, wet, and weary,
soaked with the sleet and spray,
desolate, damp, and dreary.

Fog in the dank North Sea !—
silent and clammily dripping.
Slowly and mournfully,
ghostlike, goes the shipping.
Sudden across the swell
come the fog-horns hoarsely blaring
or the clang of a warning bell,
to leave us vainly staring.

Night on the black North Sea !—
black as hell's darkest hollow.
Peering anxiously,
we search for the ships that follow.
One are the sea and sky,
dim are the figures near us,
with only the sea-bird's cry
and the swish of the waves to cheer us.

Death on the wild North Sea !—
death from the shell that shatters
(death we will face with glee,
'tis the weary wait that matters):—
death from the guns that roar,
and the splinters weirdly shrieking.
'Tis a fight to the death ; 'tis war ;
and the North Sea is redly reeking !

LEAVE

FAR from the hatefully restless, grey,
drearily sighing sea,
through God's good fields I made my way,
wandering lazily,
round-eyed, drinking in the scene—
water meadows fresh and clean,
trees and hedges strangely green,
dreaming peacefully.

Slowly the longed-for woods drew near,
breathing the breath of spring,
with scents to smell and sounds to hear
and green rides opening ;
until I saw my long-grassed glade,
cool and damp in the fragrant shade,
where the little rabbits peep and fade
with white tails flickering.

Where primroses and bluebells grow,
clustering ankle deep ;
where moss-grown tree trunks vaguely show
and stealthy shadows creep ;
there I lay, my thoughts reposing,
heavy eyelids slowly closing,
gently dozing, gently dozing,
till I fell asleep ;

lulled by the nightingale's pure tone
and the perfect song he sings ;
lulled by the never ending drone
of countless insect wings ;
lulled by the sentimental dove
ardently telling of his love,
by the song of the lark from the sky above,
and the new leaves' murmurings.

While I lay and slumbered there,
as oft I had done before,
breathing deep the scented air
full of the wood's sweet lore,
so soft and peaceful was the sound,
so pure was everything around,
so cool and fresh the friendly ground,
that I dreamed there was no war.

RHYMES

THE CALL OF THE AIR

HAVE you ever sat in crystal space, enjoying the
sensations
of an eagle hovered high above the earth,
gazing down on man's ridiculous and infantile
creations
and judging them according to their worth ?
Have you looked upon a basin small enough to
wash your face in,
with a few toys-ships collected by the shore,
and then realised with wonder that if those toys
go under
nine tenths of Britain's navy is no more ?

Have you seen a khaki maggot crawling down a
thread of cotton—
the route march of a regiment or so ?
Have you seen the narrow riband, unimportant,
half-forgotten,
that tells you that the Thames is far below ?
Have you glanced with smiling pity at the world's
most famous city,
a large grey smudge that barely strikes the eye ?
Would you like to see things truly and appreciate
them duly ?
Well then do it, damn you, do it ; learn to fly !

Have you left the ground in murkiness, all clammy,
grey, and soaking,
and struggled through the dripping, dirty
white ?

Have you seen the blank sides closing in and felt
that you were choking,
and then leapt into a land of blazing light
where the burnished sun is shining on the clouds'
bright, silver lining,
a land where none but fairy feet have trod,
where the splendour nearly blinds you and the
wonder of it binds you,
and you know you are in heaven, close to God ?

Have you tumbled from the sky until your wires
were shrilly screaming,
and watched the earth go spinning round
about ?

Have you felt the hard air beat your face until
your eyes were streaming ?

Have you turned the solar system inside out ?
Have you seen earth rush to meet you and the
fields spread out to greet you,
and flung them back to have another try ?

Would it fill you with elation to be boss of all
creation ?

Well then do it, damn you, do it ; learn to fly !

Have you fought a dummy battle, diving, twisting,
pirouetting,
at a lightning speed that takes away your
breath ?

Have you been so wildly thrilled that you have
found yourself forgetting
that it's practice, not a battle to the death ?

Have you hurtled low through narrow, tree-girt
spaces like an arrow—
seen things grow and disappear like pricked
balloons ?

Would you feel the breathless joys of it and hear
the thrilling noise of it,
the swish, the roar, the ever-changing tunes ?

Have you chased a golden sunbeam down a gold
and silver alley,
with pink and orange jewels on the floor ?

Have you raced a baby rainbow round a blue and
silver valley,
where purple caves throw back the engine's
roar ?

Have you seen the lights that smoulder on a
cloud's resplendent shoulder
standing out before a saffron-coloured sky ?

Would you be in splendid places and illimitable
spaces ?

Well then do it, damn you, do it ; learn to fly !

BAD WEATHER

To mope around
on the dull hard ground
very many weeks together
in the vilest weather
is a sad delay
for a pilot gay,
who is very nearly dying
for some complicated flying,
for the whizz ! bang ! crash !
and the hurricane's lash
and the wires that hum zoom ! zoom !

When the weather is bad,
it's extremely sad
to recline at leisure
and to contemplate the pleasure
of the coughing scream
of a great sunbeam,
or the rumbling voice
of a good Rolls Royce,
or the buzzing drone
of a nice Le Rhone—
the extreme exhilaration
of a little aviation,
and the grip and tear
of the ice-cold air
and the wires that hum zoom ! zoom !

DAWN

“MACHINES will raid at dawn,” they say.
It’s always dawn, or just before ;
why choose this wretched time of day
for making war ?

From all the hours of light there are,
why do they always choose the first ?
Is it because they know it’s far
and far the worst ?

Is it a morbid sense of fun
that makes them send us day by day
a target for the sportive Hun ?—
who knows our way,

and waits for us at dawn’s first peep,
knowing full well we shall be there,
and he, when that is done, may sleep
without a care.

And was it not Napoleon
who said (in French) these words, “Lor’
lumme !
no man can hope to fight upon
an empty tummy ” ?

Yet every morn we bold bird-boys
clamber into our little buses,
and go and make a futile noise
with bombs and cusses.

And every night the orders tell
the same monotonous old story
“machines will raid at dawn.” To hell
with death or glory !

Why can't they let us lie in bed
and, after breakfast and a wash,
despatch us, clean and fully fed,
to kill the Boche ?

I hate the dawn, as dogs hate soap :
and on my heart, when I am done,
you'll find the words engraved, “ Dawn hope-
less, streak of, one.”

COMING DOWN

WHETHER it be by dives and swoops or a spin or
a graceful glide,
whether it be by a series of loops or one long
breathless slide,
as long as you know where you're trying to go
and go more or less where you're trying,
if you want to come down, and you are coming
down,
coming down is the best part of flying.

But whether it be a broken tail or a spar that
carries away,
or whether it be your nerves that fail or a hidden
flaw in a stay,
when you're thoroughly in a wing-tip spin
and, no matter how hard you're trying,
you're still coming down and coming down,
then it's far the most damned part of flying.

And when you have been from dawn's first streak
in search of a submarine,
and you're hungry and bored and sick and weak
and there's never a thing to be seen,
till at last below the hangars show,
your wearied eyes consoling,
and you start to come down, then coming down
is far the best part of patrolling.

But when there is nothing at all in sight and
you're many a mile from home,
and the rising sea is showing white and the
breakers hiss and foam,
and your engines stop and you've got to drop
where the great grey waves are rolling,
and you've got to come down, then coming down
is the perfectest hell of patrolling.

And when you've done a three-hours' flight in the
shell-infested skies,
numbed with the cold of the awful height and the
fear that petrifies,
when you know at last that the lines are past
and the phantom of death is fading,
how you love coming down, and fall three miles
down !—
it is much the best part of raiding.

But if you are over hostile lands and you hear the
shrapnel's dunt,
and you feel your controls go slack in your hands,
or your engine stops with a grunt,
and you fear you are done and the Boche has won,
and your hopes of return are fading,
how you hate coming down ! but you've got to
come down,
and that is the devil of raiding.

THE JOYS OF FLYING

THERE is no pleasure a man may have on earth
which can compare
in any way with a similar pleasure that he may
have in the air,
wheresoever and whatsoever his dreams of bliss
may be,
he would enjoy them more by air than he would
by land or sea.

The thrill of a race or a breathless chase or the
motion of galloping horses,
the sight of the ground as it streaks below and the
dangers of hard ridden courses,
the feel of the clean cold air in his lungs and the
slap of the air in his face,
the rhythm, the swing, the rip and the spring,
and the dash of the wonderful pace,
such are joys that are hard to beat, such are
pleasures indeed,
but in the air they are thrice as good, for they
happen at thrice the speed.

The tense excitement, the savage hunts that
big game shots adore,
the heavy silence shattered at last by the sudden
grating roar,
the rustle of leaves and the stabbing light that
splinters the solid black,
the lightning charge when death looms large, and
the rifle's vengeful crack,

the howl of the wolf pack, hunger-mad in the
hush of the starlit night—
these are as nothing compared with the thrills
and the grip of aerial fight,
with the roar of the engine, the tang of the wires,
the Vickers' stuttering rattle,
the shrieking and whooping, the mounting and
swooping of rapidly flickering battle,
the swift-flung curves and the shuddering swerves,
the turning, the twisting, the spinning,
it is triumph and terror and frenzied delight to
the end from the very beginning.
The joys of sailing in unknown waters and island-
studded seas,
the feel of the boat as she forges along and heels
to the touch of the breeze,
the sound of the ripples that gurgle and bubble,
like fairy bells artfully tinkled,
the smell of the air and the touch on the face of
the glittering spray, God-sprinkled,
the glory of snaking a frail canoe through a gap
in the foam-swept crags
where the waters curl and eddy and swirl around
the hidden snags,
the flurry and froth and the eager grip where the
mighty tide is sweeping,
the paddle's whip at the well-timed stroke that
sets the birch-bark leaping,
the pleasures of drifting on wooded lakes, shim-
mering, silent, and still,

with the blue of the sky and the pines near by
and the blue of the distant hill,
the cast and the quivering tenseness of muscle,
the sudden fulfilment of wish,
the tug and the rapid bewildering tussle, the run
of the well-hooked fish,
the leaps and the dives as he struggles and strives,
the sickening dread and the rapture,
the slow, imperceptible gaining of hope and the
ultimate glory of capture,
the victor's return through the silent wood with
happiness rooted throughout him,
the sense of the glorious fitness of wonder in all
that he sees about him,
these are splendid things to do, things for a man to
love,
but not so good as the splendid things that a
man may do up above.
The glory of gambolling high in the heavens in
scenery weirdly entrancing,
abandoned and wholly free from restraint in the
manner of primitive dancing,
the pleasure of being the absolute master of every
turn and twist,
the feel of the craft as she spins about to every
move of the wrist,
the satisfaction of doing each fling smooth and
sure right through,
of knowing that every motion done is crisp and
clean and true,

the joy of exploring fresh-found clouds, and
hurting down from the summit
in a swerving slide down the glacier side with the
speed of a falling plummet,
the power of taking the sky and the earth and
making them do what he pleases,
the sight of places unblemished by man and the
touch of untainted breezes,
the soothing noise and the graceful poise of soft
and smooth descent,
the placid enjoyment of being alive and the feeling
of utter content,
these are joys that none can better on earth or
river or sea,
wheresoever and whatsoever his dreams of bliss
may be.

THE FORWARD FAIRY

WHEN flying on a sunny day
(and very nice and hot it was)
I sighted something on the way ;
I knew directly what it was.
It was a fairy, all complete
with wings and gauzy gowns and such
and satin shoes on tiny feet
and lots of jewelled crowns and such.
As my machine was fairly fast
I soon drew alongside on it.
I bowed politely as I passed
and offered her a ride on it.
She got on board without a hitch
of any sort or kind at all—
it wasn't a two-seater, which
she didn't seem to mind at all,
for down she sat upon my knee
and, what was very shocking too,
she smiled bewitchingly at me
and showed a lot of stocking too !
And as I am a nervous youth
I simply sat and gazed at her
(I was to tell the honest truth
unpleasantly amazed at her).
“ Don't sit there like an ill-bred calf,
staring and looking sickly too !

Be smart," she said, " and make me laugh
and do it very pretty quickly too !
A pretty sort of host you make,
most courteous and dutiful !
Admire my clothes for goodness' sake
or say you think I'm beautiful."
" Your clothes," I said, " are few and thin
and not the least bit suitable
for flying round the country in,
and that is irrefutable :
and as for you, although you do
look perfectly delectable,
I know of many people who
would say you're not respectable."
" A lot I care for them," she cried,
" and their respectability,
as long as you are satisfied
with my delectability.
To charm mankind by hook or crook
I think all women ought to dress.
Now don't you think that I should look
far nicer in a shorter dress ? "
She was a very forward maid,
but I was getting warier
and so I asked her what she weighed
in pounds per unit area ;
and what her range of speed might be,
and had she much stability,
and did she turn quite easily,

and loop with much facility ;
her *chassis*, was it made of wood,
and was she nice and flyable ;
her engine, was it pretty good,
and was it quite reliable ;
and did it run on castor oil,
or Castrol U unfreezable,
and did she think an aerofoil,
that varied, might be feasible.
At last she interrupted me,
“ oh stop this technicality !
I neither know nor care a d—— ;
come, show your hospitality !
And, if you won't, at least you might
endeavour to be sensible ;
your conduct, sir (to be polite),
is highly reprehensible.”
And so I did as I was told,
yet always flying higher up,
because I hoped the awful cold
might fairly quickly dry her up.
And soon her hands grew shivery,
her teeth all started chattering,
her lips grew blue and quivery,
but still she went on chattering
and trying hard to make me flirt
(I couldn't get the trick of it).
I soon grew sick of being pert—
I grew extremely sick of it ;

till finally (I *was* ill bred)
I looped and dropped her out of it.
It saved me going off my head,
there isn't any doubt of it.

NOTES

THE poems and rhymes were written during 1916 and 1917. The last only, "To my brother," was written at the beginning of 1918. They were scribbled in pencil in notebooks, in cabin or shed or actually in the air. The writer was careless of stops, and often left alternative words or lines without deciding between them.

A word of explanation is necessary of the division made into "poems" and "rhymes." The "poems" are for the most part of later date than the "rhymes" and were written with more serious intention. Probably the writer would not himself have cared to have the "rhymes" preserved, or even the "poems," except one or two. "An airman's dream," the latter part of "To my brother," and "On the wings of the morning" were all that he allowed to see the light during his lifetime, the first two in *The Spectator*, the last in *The Cornhill*. But it was thought well to print even the slighter rhymes here, if only to show how, in spite of false starts, poetry will out.

The Memoir is reprinted from *The Cornhill Magazine* for October 1918.

NOTE A

The following is scribbled in pencil in a notebook :

"I had put in a great deal of time in thinking of my perfectly good house, so all the permanent portions of it had got subconsciously shaken into a compact form, and all that I had to do was to read Rupert

Brooke's 'Grantchester' once, take a pencil and paper, and write as fast as I could until further orders.

"From my earliest childhood I had sent myself to sleep and endured dull sermons by thinking of my house and its surroundings.

"The house and grounds have always been the same, a low, rambling, many-gabled, ivy-covered, quaint old house, with the same arrangement of rivers, brooks, woods, and fens around. There have always been a great many spaniels, a fair number of wire-haired terriers, and one or two Irish wolf-hounds, great danes, and the like. The stables have always had the same horses, which I will not try to describe for fear of technical errors, though I know them well enough in my mind's eye. Always have there been the same boats, the canoes a birch-bark and a carvel-built Canadian, the same punt, the same outrigger two-seater, and the family barge, and the same garden has smiled and dreamed and droned through the summer days, with restful, sheltered nooks in great frequency : and always has there been an abundance of beautiful books and pictures.

"In other directions, however, there have been alterations. The moat and the drawbridge that used to surround my house have gone. In their time they served me well, and often have they saved me from sudden surprise attacks, both by red Indians, and by the king's men, in Robin Hood's days. As the years went by, however, the drawbridge began to get rusty, and to squeak prodigiously every time I wound it up, and the moat, too, began to smell, either because of drainage troubles, or from the large number

of my enemies' bodies that had been thrown into it with a disdainful laugh.

"About the same time, guns began to appear in the room in which my score of friendly Indians, or trusty archers, used to keep their assorted weapons. As I began to be able to hit the target with my first rifle, the moat, the drawbridge, the Robin Hoods, Little Johns, Redskins, bows and arrows, tomahawks, spears, and swords began to disappear, and in their stead I protected myself with a high velocity '22 rifle, fitted with a telescopic sight and silencer, with which I used to slaughter all my enemies at a range of five miles or more, to their great discomfiture. Then, when I was promoted to a shot gun, I became a country-gentleman with no enemies."

NOTE B

The following is from a rough draft of some chapters of a book about flying :

"*Flying in General*.—I had quite made up my mind when I came down from my first flight I would sit down forthwith and with very great ease write some most superior verses on the thrill and grandeur of flying. Accordingly I immediately proceeded to evolve magnificent and fine sounding phrases describing what I felt sure it would be like, and to search diligently for suitable rhymes.

"However when I did come down, my only thought was to go up again, and, as to verses, I neither could nor would have written them for anything on earth.

“Wouldn’t—because my fine phrases were all wrong, and, anyhow, why write verses when you might be flying? and couldn’t—because I had as many impressions in my mind as there are (I won’t say grains of sand on the seashore, for I am not such a preposterous liar as all that) say, feathers in a starling (a very good way of estimating numbers too, for the number depends largely on the age of the starling, and whether he has been plucked or not, though why anyone should pluck a starling, I can’t say, unless he thought it was the right way to set about stuffing it, and whoever thinks that is wrong, for I once tried to stuff a bird that way myself, and I could make nothing of it).

“However, as I was saying, my mind was very full of half-grasped impressions, like a small bag packed tight with young eels, and out of that seething mass I couldn’t have picked one solid, sensibly worded impression for the life of me.

“It was silly of me to expect to write directly after my first flight, for one doesn’t sit down to write a rhapsody on strawberries and cream with a belly full of ’em, but with an empty belly, and a great desire for them.”

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